

etc.

MAGAZINE

City College of San Francisco • Fall 2010

From Waste to Wine

The proof is in the compost

Mr. USA Presses On

A muscleman's uplifting journey

The War at Home

An Israeli soldier's story

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DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM Spring 2011 Schedule of Classes

JOUR 19	Contemporary News Media			
	MWF	9:00-10:00 am	Ocean	Gonzales
	T	6:30-9:30 pm	Mission	Graham
JOUR 21	News Writing and Reporting			
	MWF	10:00-11:00 am	Ocean	Gonzales
	T	6:30-9:30 pm	Mission	Rochmis
JOUR 22	Feature Writing			
	W	6:30-9:30 pm	Mission	Graham
	R	6:30-9:30 pm	Mission	Rochmis
JOUR 23	Electronic Copy Editing			
	W	6:30-9:30 pm	Mission	Rochmis
JOUR 24	Newspaper Laboratory			
	MWF	12:00-1:00 pm	Ocean	Gonzales
	Plus 4 hours lab by arrangement			
JOUR 25	Editorial Management			
	MWF	1:00-2:00 pm	Ocean	Gonzales
JOUR 29	Magazine Editing & Production			
	M	6:30-8:30 pm	Mission	Graham
	Plus 3 hours lab by arrangement			
JOUR 31	Internship Experience			
	Hours Arranged		Ocean	Gonzales
JOUR 37	Intro to Photojournalism			
	W	6:30-9:30 pm	Mission	Lifland
	TR	6:30-9:30 pm	Mission	Lifland

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a note from the editors

We all face obstacles. With varying degrees of success, most of us try to overcome them.

In this issue of Etc. magazine, we're presenting a half-dozen men who have pushed – or are pushing – their own personal challenges to the side.

Three of our stories explore addiction and contrasting levels to which it has been conquered. Jimmy Wilson became bodybuilding's Mr. USA. Brian Rinker is discovering life as a sober student. Casey Davin...well, he's still trying.

Two of our pieces confront the human residue of war. Written by veterans of conflicts in Iraq and the Middle East, they are provocative accounts of what soldiers

encounter in the midst of – and following – combat service.

And in our cover story, we present the inspiring life of Harry Cordellos, a man for whom not seeing is believing.

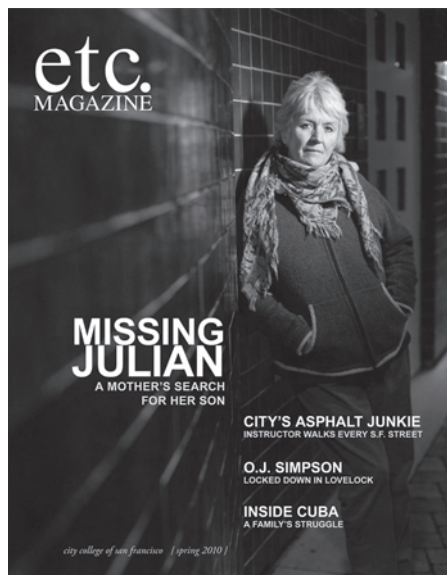
There is some lighter fare.

We chronicle the efforts a group of people are taking to control City College's feral cat population. And, we show you how compost from City's campuses contributes to some of Northern California's finest wines.

We hope you enjoy.

The Editors

letters to the editors



Update on Julian

Editor's note: *"Missing Julian" was a first-person cover story about a mother's son who has been missing for seven years. The story ran in the last issue of Etc. magazine.*

Editor: My cover story for the 2010 fall issue of Etc. magazine, "Missing Julian,"

was extremely difficult to write, and a sad story to read.

Once published, I received many kudos from family, friends, and a few CCSF classmates for finally putting the story of my son's disappearance down on paper.

I received only one written response from the story, but it was a whopper - an e-mail from my son's former high school science teacher.

He wrote saying he'd read my story in Etc. and just wanted to let me know my son was dead. He said, "several students came to me shortly after Julian died and said he overdosed in the Bay Area." His body had been found in an alley. He said he was real sorry I didn't know.

The police were notified and given the e-mail. The teacher agreed to a telephone interview with them in June. When questioned, he claimed he couldn't remember which kids told him Julian was dead, but remembered many other details surrounding the event. He agreed when school resumed in August he'd look back at seating charts from the time when Julian disappeared to help "jog his memory."

It's November and we're still waiting - waiting for this teacher to bring forth some

facts – something one would imagine any science teacher would offer to support their conclusions – especially when informing a mother that her child is dead.

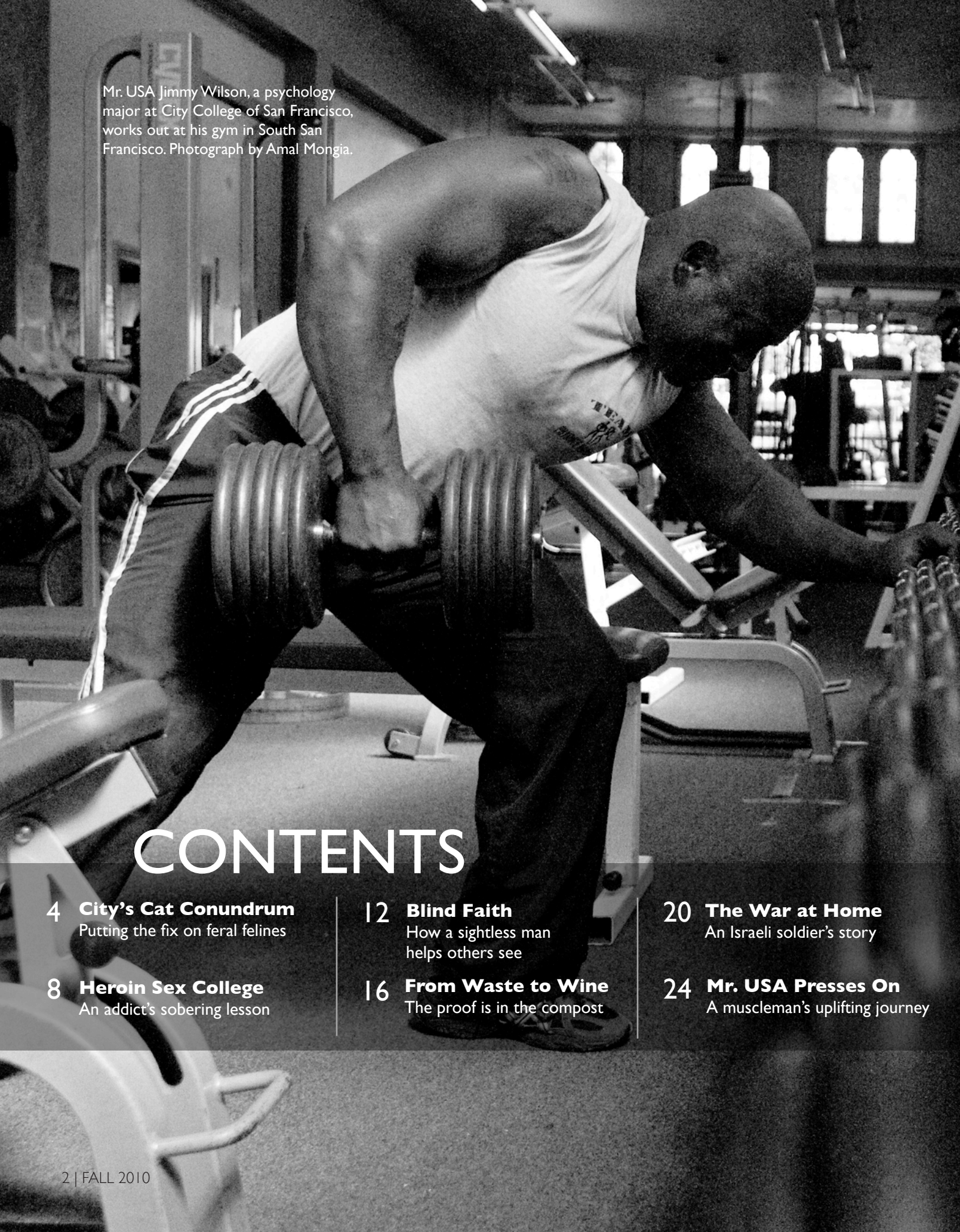
Julian remains a "missing person." His body has never been recovered.

*Candace Hansen
Julian's mother*

Remembering Ollie

Editor: Thank you for sending me the Spring 2010 copy of Etc. magazine. Your article is excellent – as is the entire publication. You should be a proud Editor. It contains an amazing variety of articles – all well researched and written with an interesting and personal point of view. In addition to City's Asphalt Junkie, my wife and I particularly enjoyed the piece on Ollie Matson. That goes back to our early days – my wife at Washington High School and I at USF when Ollie was playing. He's two years older than I.

*Ron Miguel
President, SF Planning Commission*



Mr. USA Jimmy Wilson, a psychology major at City College of San Francisco, works out at his gym in South San Francisco. Photograph by Amal Mongia.

CONTENTS

4 City's Cat Conundrum
Putting the fix on feral felines

8 Heroin Sex College
An addict's sobering lesson

12 Blind Faith
How a sightless man helps others see

16 From Waste to Wine
The proof is in the compost

20 The War at Home
An Israeli soldier's story

24 Mr. USA Presses On
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28 Battling Back

- Iraq vet aims to write wrongs
- The costs and benefits of war

32 Street Student

The challenge of doing homework without a home

FRONT COVER: Seventy-two-year-old Harry Cordellos was the first blind, full-time student to attend City College. In addition to getting an "A" in photography, he's run 154 marathons and swum the Golden Gate Channel four times. Photograph by Sabrina Wong.

BACK COVER: Tippy, one of the many feral cats on the Ocean Campus, has just finished eating food that was set out for him by a "cat woman." There is a group of people on campus who are dedicated to caring for and neutering homeless cats. Photograph by Susan Boeckmann.

City's Cat Conundrum

Putting the fix on feral felines

Story and photographs by Susan Boeckmann

There are about 60 million feral cats in the United States. Although their mortality rate is high, the population is constantly replenished by uncontrolled breeding and a constant influx of abandoned pets. They live in both rural and urban areas... In alleys and parks, behind shopping centers and schools... In industrial areas... And on farms and golf courses. Almost anywhere there is shelter and a source of food, you'll find them.



Azian Nurudin, who has just dropped off a 9-week-old kitten caught on the Ocean Campus, looks at posters of lost cats and dogs at the Animal Care and Control shelter.

There is a secret village on the Ocean Campus. Its location is known to only a few. The tiny houses are painted red and white, with tar and shingle roofs. The dirt paths between them are well-travelled and often muddy. It's the home of City College's feral cat colony.

Feral cats are the offspring of domestic cats that have been discarded, lost, or left to fend for themselves. Although wary of humans, they remain dependent on them for survival. Most of City College's cats were born into the colony, but in past years others have been abandoned on campus.

Shirley Barger, a staff person in the IT department, straps a heavy pack filled with water and cat food onto a folding luggage cart every Sunday, and sets off to visit several feeding stations on the east side of campus. While rinsing out food bowls she points to the smokey-gray cats watching her from the bushes.

"They're all siblings, some kind of Russian Blue breed," she says. "That's Cutie Pie and Golden. There's also Smokey and Alfie. And one more... I can't remember his name. They were dumped here as kittens. I don't know why anyone would do that to a kitten."

Azian Nurudin, who lives on Judson Avenue across from the Horticulture Department, pokes through tall grass on the northwest side of campus. She's been told that someone heard a kitten crying in the area earlier in the day. Not sure if it's been weaned yet, she's desperate to find the kitten before it starves. But the grass is too dense. Finally, she has to stop. She leaves fresh food and water for the kitten hoping that it is old enough to eat. She'll be back the next day to search again.

Barger and Nurudin are among a small group of staff, faculty, students and neighbors who have been caring for Ocean Campus' feral cats for more than a dozen years. Their goal is to manage the colony of about two-dozen cats, making sure they are healthy, well-fed, and most importantly, neutered. Their approach, called "Trap-Neuter-Release," is considered the most effective and inexpensive way to deal with the feral cat problem, according to both



Golden, one of the City College feral cats, waits impatiently for breakfast at one of the feeding stations on the east side of campus.

the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the Humane Society of the United States.

Every day, rain or shine, members of the group put out fresh food and water for the cats at a half dozen feeding sites around the campus. They clear away the old food and wash out the bowls. They try to be discrete because they do not want anyone to know exactly where the cats are located. Even well-intentioned people can disturb the colony.

There's often a misconception about why people feed feral cats. Rather than being the obsession of crazy cat ladies, feeding serves a purpose. It keeps the cats from raiding garbage cans, fighting over food with neighborhood pets or hunting rodents and birds. It also allows the feeders to monitor the colony's population and health. Feeders know when an animal becomes sick or pregnant, or if a new cat has joined the colony.

Food also serves as bait for catching

the cats. Once trapped, they are taken to the San Francisco SPCA, to be spayed or neutered, vaccinated, treated for fleas, and then returned to the colony. A fixed cat will no longer fight during mating season, or mark its territory.

Stray cats, and kittens younger than 8 weeks, are turned over to Animal Care and Control. Once they are socialized or, in the case of strays, re-socialized, they're put up for adoption in the city's animal shelter.

The city's SPCA feral-fix program, funded entirely by private donations, offers its services free to anyone who cares for a colony within city limits. Other cities in the Bay Area have feral-fix programs, but none on such a large scale and none of them are free. Since the program was founded in 1993 more than 20,000 feral cats have been trapped and fixed.

Ten years ago Nurudin answered an ad placed in a Sunnyside Neighborhood Association newsletter by Rosalie Wolf, then an English instructor on the Ocean Campus. Wolf had started the trapping and neutering process on this campus years before, and was looking for people to help with feeding the cats. Now Nurudin is the chief caretaker of the City College colony. She also takes care of two colonies at USEF.

Until recently, Nurudin thought she had the Ocean Campus colony under control. Then she learned about another group of 10-20 feral cats on the west side of campus.

Karen Puon, a night student, had been feeding them for five years. Worried that the cats would go hungry after she graduated, Puon contacted the SPCA for help. That information was passed on to Nurudin, who since has slowly been trapping and fixing those cats with the help of volunteers

from SF-SPCA's "Cat Assistance Team."

Nurudin and Puon met for the first time this summer in a parking lot near the Student Health Center. Michele Blunt and Nadine May of the CAT team were also there.

As Puon cradled a kitten in a baby blanket, she recited the genealogy of every litter born in the colony during the past five years.

Nurudin, Blunt and May listened patiently. After Puon left, Blunt expressed her frustration.

"Feeding is part of a greater plan," she said, "If you feed them, you need to take responsibility. You've got to get them fixed, too, otherwise you're just adding to the

population."

There are about 60 million feral cats in the United States. Although their mortality rate is high, the population is constantly replenished by uncontrolled breeding and a constant influx of abandoned pets. They live in both rural and urban areas... In alleys and parks, behind shopping centers and schools... In industrial areas... And on farms and golf courses. Almost anywhere there is shelter and a source of food, you'll find them.

There are hundreds of feral cat colonies throughout the city. Blunt knows of at least 30. Two at USEF... At least one at San Francisco State... There are colonies in the Excelsior and along the waterfront, in

Golden Gate and McLaren parks... And there are countless small backyard colonies, according to May.

It is impossible to know exactly how many feral cats there are in the city. Maryanne Buxton, feral cat coordinator for the SPCA, is reluctant to even guess because a low figure might lead people to think the feral cat problem isn't that serious, while a high number might suggest the Trap-Neuter-Release program isn't working, and that harsher steps need to be taken.

Gloria Koch-Gonzalez, the Recreation and Park Department's manager of Golden Gate Park, sighs deeply when asked how many feral cats are in the park. "Oh... a lot," she says.

Park gardeners counted 31 feeding stations in the park a few years ago.

"The intent of the TNR program was to monitor the cats and trap the loose cats," she says. "But I don't think the intent of the program is being followed." She describes the way cats are fed in the park as "guerilla activity."

"The cat advocates



Blunt holds Kylie, a City College rescue kitten who was trapped and raised by Karen Puon.

set up a structure wherever they want,” Koch-Gonzales complains. “According to the bylaws of TNR, you’re not supposed to erect any structures or houses in public spaces. People have actually nailed shelters to the trees.”

She also warns of the danger cats pose to ground-nesting birds in the park.

Feral cats will hunt birds and kill them, but they are relatively bad at it. They have more success hunting mice. In a fragmented ecosystem, such as a city, or in an isolated ecosystem, such as Golden Gate Park, where bird populations are already in a fragile state, cats can cause havoc.

Koch-Gonzalez believes the answer to controlling the feral cat population is trapping them and moving them to “cat farms.”

Another feral cat conundrum is figuring out what to do with the animals. Colony caretakers note that “Trap and remove” is traumatic for the cats. And they say it is neither cost effective nor efficient.

Boarding a cat at a sanctuary can cost up to \$2,000 a cat, May says. And it takes months to get the cat acclimated to its new surroundings before it can be let out of its cage.

When Wolf retired from teaching, she took about a dozen cats from the colony to a cat sanctuary in Southern California. Within a few years, the CCSF colony grew back to its original size.

Another “quick” solution, known as “trap and kill,” has been condemned by animal rights advocates as inhumane. And it’s prohibitively expensive. Holding an animal in a shelter, euthanizing it, and then disposing

of its body is costly.

“Eradication doesn’t work,” says Blunt. “If you kill all the cats in one area, other cats will just move in.”

Unless you eliminate the conditions that made the location attractive to cats in the first place, cats will continue to be drawn there.

There are no fast or easy solutions to the feral cat problem.

Trap-Neuter-Release requires patience and an investment of time and money. Results are seen within the first six months, when the birth rate declines.

The average lifespan of a feral cat living in a managed colony is 12-15 years, comparable to a house cat. Feral cats on

their own, however, are vulnerable to injury and disease and may live only 2-3 years. It can take a decade for a colony to shrink or disappear completely. As the remaining cats continue to age and die of natural causes, May says they become “ghost colonies.”

Trap-Neuter-Release works... until someone dumps a new cat in the area. And then the process starts all over again.

Half the battle in caring for feral cats is educating people about responsible pet ownership.

“People have pet cats and don’t get them fixed,” says Nurudin. “Then those cats get lost, dumped or run away.”

Many stray cats are unprepared for life on the streets and die of starvation or injury. Others end up joining a colony and start breeding.

“It’s sadder to see a tame cat on its own than a wild one,” says Blunt. “The tame ones are just scared. They all require time to get used to people again.”

Magnet, a stray black cat, lived on Science Hill and was fed by name?, a welding department (instructor??). When he left campus (retired??? got a job elsewhere??), he stopped feeding Magnet. He thought she would find mice to eat. But Magnet had become dependent on people. When the colony caretakers heard about Magnet, they trapped her, fostered her and then adopted her out. She now lives in Portland, OR.

“You want all the cats you catch to be tame and adoptable, but that’s not how it goes,” Blunt says. “It’s easy to trap cats and take them in to be fixed. It’s much harder to find them homes. You can’t possibly keep every cat for yourself.”

Blunt says she can use some help. She’s always looking for people to foster or adopt cats.

“Everyone I know thinks I’m crazy,” she says.

Everyone except the cats.



Michele Blunt checks the traps between two bungalows. These cages are being used to train the cats to associate the traps with food.

E-mail Susan Boeckmann at susan.boeckmann@yahoo.com

HEROIN SEX COLLEGE

An addict's sobering lesson

By Brian Rinker

Hi. My name is Brian and I'm a heroin addict.
And an alcoholic. I'm also a thief and a liar.
I've been to rehab a couple times and jail on multiple occasions.
I've been charged with felony domestic violence,
and lived in bushes and under bridges.
Now I am a student at CCSF and could be sitting next to you. >>



Brian Rinker sits in an artist studio on Capp Street in the Mission District.

Photograph by Susan Boeckmann.

I was 21 and drunk the first time I bought heroin. From a friend. Though I could've smoked it right then, I shoved it in my pocket and waited until I could get a needle to shoot it. After that, the rest is a blur.

Heroin made me stop thinking.

Stop caring.

It was wonderful, at first.

Then, it led to a \$100-a-day habit...

to lying, stealing, manipulating, jail, rehab and emergency rooms.

It was wonderful even when I was shooting up with dirty needles, risking AIDS, Hepatitis C and abscesses.

I was hospitalized multiple times with abscesses, once with one in my left thigh muscle. Surgeons removed over a liter of puss and packed the rotten hole the size of two grapefruit with gauze.

High and desperate, I started a relationship with Sylvia, a girl I met in rehab. I turned her on to heroin. She overdosed the first time I shot her up. The paramedics came and revived her. Before they took her to the hospital, I stole \$20 from her purse.

A year and half later, I awoke in the middle of the night to her clawing and slapping my back with ravenous hatred. I smacked her, hoping to calm her. Instead, she ran out the back door, wailing. As she ran through the neighbor's house and out into the street, I crawled under the bed, stashing the dope – not from the police who were banging on the front door, but from Sylvia. I was about to be arrested and needed something to look forward to while lying awake in jail.

The best thing about heroin was that I believed all this was worth it.

Seven years later, I hit bottom.

In a trailer park in Soquel, near Santa Cruz, I sit alone. A single mattress lies on the floor. The blankets are blackened with cigarette burns. A TV blares and illuminates the room.

My chair is positioned two feet from the TV, in the middle of the room. After shooting a gram of heroin, I slump forward,

holding a 40-ounce Country Club Malt Liquor and smoking an old cigarette butt. While slipping in and out of consciousness, I begin to question my life... And I dream of the future.

Losing all hope of sobriety, I'll do whatever it takes to get loaded. I'll accept the consequences. I've already been homeless, and have been stealing for years. If



"Untitled" by Brian Rinker

I'm careful, it might be years before I end up in prison. It is my greatest fear, but if I can get heroin in there, it will be OK. Not being big or tough, I won't be beating up or killing anyone for dope. Sucking dick and taking it up the ass would be my only chance of getting loaded.

I lean back in my chair and sigh. Stale beer puddles around my feet. Pulling the cigarette butt out of the smoldering hole in the crotch of my pants, I take a drag. My future flashes one more time before my eyes. On second thought, maybe sobriety deserves one last chance.

A few weeks later I leave town with all my possessions in a small duffle bag. I spend my last \$10 on heroin, then scam a friend out of a gram, get into my 1983 Toyota Celica and drive to Mt. Mesa in the Kern River Valley, where my parents live. It's in the middle of nowhere.

I had stolen thousands of dollars from them, at one point selling their wedding rings for \$20. I lied to them all the time and begged for money.

"I would look at your father and say 'I don't know what to do,'" my mother says. "It's a terrible, terrible feeling to have. I wanted to die. I thought about dying a lot."

They had retired early a few years ago, sold their house in Santa Cruz and moved to the Sierra foothills.

"We ran away from you. You weren't the only reason... but you were no reason to stay," my mother told me years later.

Well, it didn't work. I had found them.

After an evening at home with mom and dad, I get loaded one last time in the bathroom.

I'm out of dope and I don't know where to score out here. That's why I came. To kick this habit.

My sobriety begins Dec. 19, 2008. I'm 29.

A gnawing anxiety burns in my gut. For three days I roll around in my bed and on the floor of my parent's

house, dry heaving. During the next two weeks, I can't sleep. The worst part isn't shitting myself or puking everywhere. It isn't the ball of fire tearing through my abdomen, making every moment miserable. The worst part is the madness – my mind races in circles, trying to solve, manipulate, do anything to fix the pain. And it knows the answer to all my problems — heroin.

But to get heroin means to go back to that lifestyle, and I know where that leads.

For months I'm in a fog. I can't remember anything except for the lying, cheating, stealing and, of course, heroin, heroin, heroin. Now, lost without drugs or alcohol, I am pissed off and have no idea what the fuck to do.

At 30 days clean and sober I register at Cerro Coso Community College in Kern County.

I enroll in two classes during the spring semester of 2009 – Ethics and Introduction to Substance Abuse Issues. One I know a lot about, the other, practically nothing.

Being a smart ass doesn't fly in ethics

class. The teacher is a bitch trying to ruin my life, and I almost e-mail her telling her so. I might fail this class. I want to drop out so bad. But I don't. For the first time in my life, I continue and I try.

At 29, I learn how to learn.

In both my classes, the teachers and students acknowledge my improvement. I begin to feel proud and good about myself, which is shocking because I have never felt that way before. I am suddenly an authority on substance abuse and the teacher tells me all the students really respect and admire me. What the hell is going on? This is not me.

While going to school I attend AA and NA meetings daily. I work with my sponsor and develop a program of recovery. In school and at meetings the same issues are emphasized: don't use drugs or alcohol, become a better person, and learn to cope in a world where I am not the center of everything. It drives me nuts. I'm losing my mind. And to complicate matters more, my groin begins to stir. My sex drive begs to be unleashed. For five years it has been suppressed by heroin. Now it is back, consuming my life. I must get laid no matter what.

It's rough finding a decent girl to fuck around here. The town is dry. The wind roars across the barren hills, echoing out of the crevices, imprisoning the valley within. I am trapped and alone.

Desperate and sexually frustrated, I turn to nature, and begin river rafting. Channeling all my pent-up sexual energy, I run the rapids of the Kern River all summer long. And then, after seven months clean and sober, I finally have sex.

Alicia, 22, was recently released from jail on felony probation. I met her father in AA and he introduced us. I have never dated a girl and then had sex without the aid of alcohol—ever. It's a life changing experience, and I want more. However, she is only visiting for the summer and before she leaves town, I have already ruined things.

It turns out I have no idea how to have a healthy relationship. I seem to confuse sex with love and love with control. I become more and more obsessed and replace heroin with my convoluted understanding of sex and love.

I return to college in the fall, assuming I will find what I'm looking for.

This time, I enroll as a full-time student at Cerro Coso, which is hidden in a back alley behind Vons supermarket – where students steal shopping carts and bring them to school to use as benches.

The school is full of meth addicts and pregnant teenagers. I start dating Natasha, 19, who has a one-year-old son. Overly persistent and completely insincere, all I want is for her to like me and let me into her pants.

Things don't work out well.

My AA sponsor suggests trying honesty. So, I tell Natasha that I only want to have sex with her. She calls me an asshole and a pig.

Soon I begin dating another girl. Things get a little more serious and, surprisingly, I have fun and enjoy spending time with a woman. Our relationship is still unhealthy, but not quite as unhealthy as the previous ones.

I make plans to move to San Francisco, a place with more educational opportunities and, of course, more women.

I live on Capp between 16th and 17th streets in the Mission. Trash is everywhere. People lurk in alcoves, shout and smoke crack. The nastiest whores imaginable hobble down the street. Junkies sit on the sidewalk, cook up and shoot dope.

Sometimes I feel more at home here than I care to admit.

Other times I hate it.

People are waiting to meet their dealer or looking for a hustle, waiting to come up. I feel that desperation, that anxiety, that anticipation.

Thank God only a block away hipster kids rule, and I can get lost amidst the boutiques, bars and coffee shops.

It's amazing how beautiful the women are around here. They zip by me on their stupid fixed-gear bicycles and wear ridiculous outfits.

Standing on the cusp of two absurd worlds, I am overwhelmed with self-consciousness, fear and doubt.

I turn to sex, hoping it will make everything OK. Like when I discovered alcohol at 15. Even while puking in a bush, I thought that booze held something magical and that it would fix my life. When drinking wasn't enough, heroin took its place and then nothing mattered.

I realize this doesn't make sense, but for me sex isn't about getting laid anymore. It's about a better way of life and the belief that sex will suddenly get me a great job and make me super smart. Everyone will love, adore and praise me. It's my way of coping with life and not knowing how.

After a couple of awkward sexual relationships it becomes obvious that none of this is true.

I go to school, hoping that attending City College will distract me from my problems, and put my thoughts to some productive use. School provides structure.

This is common for recovering addicts, says Dee Dee Stout, who teaches courses here in the drug and alcohol certificate program. Eighty percent of the program's enrollment consists of recovering alcoholics and addicts.

"School can be a healthy way to make use of the shitty parts of your life," Stout says.

"It's like a slice of life. If you can function in this microcosm, you can play out who you think you want to be and it can be a lot safer."

It's true. All I've ever wanted is to feel safe and happy.

But the oblivion that drugs and alcohol bring, the denial of reality, the complete removal from everyday society – all of this is sometimes tempting.

So I continue going to AA and NA meetings because I believe I don't belong anywhere and don't deserve to be happy. Finally, I'm realizing there are no reasons or justifications for why things happen in my life. They just happen.

For the time being, I like to think I have life figured out. After two years of sobriety, nothing defines me. Not heroin or alcohol. Not school or jobs or relationships. Not even sex.

Even with a long list of failures and some recent successes, I am still only a struggling human being. Just like you, nothing more.

Email Brian Rinker at brianrinker@gmail.com

BLIND FAITH

How a sightless man helps others see

By Thomas Figg-Hoblyn
Photographs by Sabrina Wong

Harry Cordellos leans back and grips the handle of the tow rope. In two seconds, he and 10 other skiers are yanked forward by a 220-horsepower ski boat. They accelerate from 0 to 22 mph in the blink of an eye.

Cordellos and five other men are at arms' length, forming the foundation of a three-tier human pyramid. Three women climb onto their shoulders to form the second tier. Two more scale their way to the top of the 16-foot-high formation.

As they buzz the jam-packed

grandstand, the top pair waves an American flag. Cordellos smiles. The crowd cheers.

It's spring 1993. Cordellos is 55. And he's participating in the grand finale at Florida's Cypress Gardens water ski show.

As the pyramid dismantles, Cordellos drops his rope, glides toward the shore, kicks out of his skis and jumps onto the beach. He makes his way to the stage with the other performers and acknowledges the crowd, which he cannot see.

Harry Cordellos is blind. >>



Harry Cordellos, a 72-year-old City College alumnus, has run 154 marathons, swum the Golden Gate Channel four times and perfected double back flips off the high dive. He bowls, plays golf and ping-pong, alpine and cross-country skis, ice skates, and kayaks. And he's done it all blind.

As the adrenaline dissipates, he reaches down and feels the legs of his blue, sequined tuxedo. Only the cuffs are wet. His performance was flawless.

"It felt like I just hit the winning home run at the World Series in Yankee Stadium."

A 72-year-old City College alumnus, Cordellos has run 154 marathons, swam the Golden Gate Channel four times and perfected double back flips off the high dive. He bowls, plays golf and ping-pong, alpine and cross-country skis, ice skates, and kayaks.

He's an inspirational speaker – schools, corporations and private groups pay him to tell his story

For Harry Cordellos, life is about competing with yourself.

"I have to compete because most people think I can't do anything... The hardest part of blindness is dealing with the attitudes of others, always being compared to a sighted person – having to excel to prove otherwise."

In certain ways, he "sees" better than a sighted person. And pushes himself harder.

At his condominium in Novato, Cordellos plays "Bye Bye Baby" on an electric organ, surrounded by his athletic trophies. Perhaps the most valued, an Olympic torch he carried in 2002, rests above his head on a shelf he custom-made in his woodshop.

He lives alone, by choice. His two-bedroom condo is dark inside – most of the light fixtures don't have bulbs. The curtains are drawn. There are no pictures on the walls. He's converted the second bedroom into his office, where documents are organized with Braille labels. Everything has its place. He's memorized where things are and finds them by touch. In the utensil drawer in the kitchen, there are only the basics – a knife, a fork, a spoon and a can opener.

In the bathroom, there's one towel, a hair brush and a tooth brush. He shaves

with a razor and shaving cream in front of the bathroom mirror. The last time he saw himself in the mirror was 1956.

Ike was president and Harry had a full head of hair.

"I know I look different now and that my face has changed with age," he says. "I am not sure what I look like. I imagine my hair is brown with some gray... People tell me I look very athletic for my age."

His brother, Dennis, who lives nearby, helps him shop and do paperwork. He sorts through his brother's mail, manages



Working in the dark, Cordellos operates a drill press in his workshop in Novato.

his checkbook and helps him plan speaking engagements. But Harry does all his own cooking and cleaning. His meals consist of TV dinners, pasta and homemade casserole. He listens to local sports and the news on an old 19-inch TV with basic cable, or to books on tape when he wants to "escape reality." He recently finished the Harry Potter series.

Cordellos goes to the YMCA in Stonestown five days a week, traveling back and forth from Novato on the bus, which takes up to two hours each way.

He supports himself through his speaking engagements, investments and Social Security.

"Years ago, people would tease you if you remained single, saying that you would be a bachelor all your life. Nowadays they assume you're gay. Not that there is any-

thing wrong with being gay."

So brave in other ways, he's never risked a romantic relationship. And he doesn't like to talk about it. Perhaps that's what makes Harry run.

"I've seen too many blind couples, family and relatives go through break ups."

Although he says he isn't lonely – he sometimes wishes he had someone else to do things with.

"I don't want to stay at home and get bored – that's why I stay so busy."

Often described as "the World's Greatest Blind Athlete," a title he is not comfortable with, Cordellos has received a number of awards and set numerous records, including the best time for a blind runner at the Boston marathon – 2 hours, 57 minutes and 42 seconds. He won the "Most Courageous" award for his 1968 Bay to Breakers race and holds the overall record (43) for the most consecutive Bay to Breakers runs.

He was the first blind man to complete the Iron Man Triathlon in Hawaii, where he swam 2.4 miles, bicycled 112 miles and ran a 26.2-mile marathon.

These events push competitors to their limits – physically and mentally. For Cordellos, it demands a hundred times more stamina and determination. And a lot of trust.

He relies upon a guide to lead him through competitions.

"I don't feel sorry for Harry – he is an excellent runner," says Mike Koomis, a retired San Francisco firefighter who has been Cordellos' running partner for 17 years. Every Tuesday and Thursday morning, they run five miles around Lake Merced.

"Harry is a conservative and I'm a liberal, so we have a lot of fun discussing politics and religion," Koomis says.

This year, though, they both voted for Jerry Brown. "I voted for Jerry Brown even though I am Republican," Cordellos says. "I didn't trust the other candidate. I am not into politics, though, and left half the ballot blank."

"Most of Harry's training partners last a few years, then move on," writes Janet Wells, a former reporter for the San Jose Mercury News who has written his biogra-



Photograph courtesy of Harry Cordellos

Cordellos doesn't just water ski. He jumps. He was the first blind man to jump a distance of more than 40 feet on water skis. At Cypress Gardens, shown here, he performed "air chair" stunts, ramp jumps and was a regular in the grand finale ensemble.

phy, "No Limits."

"Some relocate to other parts of the country or get married or start time-consuming jobs. But many simply burn out on Harry's relentless enthusiasm," she writes.

His sister, Joanne says, "He just doesn't know when to quit."

Mike Restani, who was Cordellos' long-time running partner, guided him numerous times through Marin County's tortuous 7.5-mile Dipsea cross-country race. But he had to distance himself.

"It became too much... I was getting up at 5:30 every morning, working 40 hours a week in a screw machine shop. Harry couldn't understand why I didn't want to get up early on a Saturday, my day off, and go run 20 miles.

"Harry became a great athlete," Restani told Wells, "but he had a lot of help."

Peter Cordellos remembers his younger brother's first marathon.

"Harry came across the Golden Gate Bridge and he had blood all over his legs. His running guide went through a break in the guard rail, and didn't warn him... He forgot about him. Harry smacked into the

guard rail, but got up and finished."

Cordellos trip from Santa Catalina Island to Long Beach, featured in the documentary film "Harry's Adventures," set the record for open water skiing – 31.5 miles.

On his first attempt, Cordellos got dizzy and became sick 13 miles off Catalina. As he bobbed in the Pacific, a Great White shark was sighted. After he was pulled on board, a reporter asked, "What did you think of that shark out there?" Cordellos laughed. He thought it was a joke.

On his second attempt, organizers brought a gun.

Afterward, he said, "No marathon has ever been that exciting. In a marathon you have the crowds and the honking horns and all that, but out there on the water there's just an endless stream of waves and spray coming (at you)... There was a certain amount of anxiety... I just didn't want to fail. I felt these tight feelings in my wrists and wondered, 'Am I really going to be able to do it or am I going to spend the day floundering around in the water.'"

Cordellos doesn't just water ski. He jumps. He was the first blind man to jump a distance of more than 40 feet on water

skis. At Cypress Gardens, he performed "air chair" stunts, ramp jumps and was a regular in the grand finale ensemble.

A San Francisco native, Cordellos went to Washington High School, City College and Cal State Hayward. Born with congenital glaucoma, his vision has never been better than 10 percent.

Even when he could see, he said, "It was like looking through wax paper."

After complications from his 13th eye operation, Cordellos became totally blind. He was 23. He said he considered suicide. "But I knew that if I took my own life, I would be denying my belief that God existed."

His parents, Peter and Myrtle, were very protective. They made sure he had a traveling companion whenever he left the house. The family lived on 47th Avenue in the Sunset, within walking distance of Playland at the Beach, where the Cordellos family owned a restaurant called "Pete's Place."

In 1958, a friend referred Harry to the Orientation Center for the Blind, which introduced him to a new way of living. He learned to walk with a cane, operate power

continues on page 36

from waste to wine

The proof is in the compost

By Chad William Rochkind
Photographs by Frank Ladra

San Francisco is asleep. All the drunks have stumbled home. Muni is on Owl Service.

The sidewalks are lined with black, blue and green bins. They stand outside each building like sentinels on night watch.

All is quiet before dawn.

Then the streets begin to hum.

It may seem simple, but what's about to happen on those streets is quite extraordinary.

On June 23, 2009, the history of waste in San Francisco took a dramatic turn when Mayor Gavin Newsom signed the Mandatory Recycling and Compost Ordinance into law.

With it, the green bin was born.

The ordinance, passed by a 9-to-2 vote of the Board of Supervisors, requires commercial, industrial, and residential units to sort organic material from waste.

And so, San Francisco became the first city in the nation to impose mandatory composting.

Compostible material amounts to more than a third of what the city sends to landfills. Another third is recyclable, according to the city's Department of the Environment. The purpose of the Mandatory Recycling and Composting Ordinance – to reduce waste –

is designed to eliminate the need for a landfill entirely by 2020.

The ordinance also amends the codes followed by the Department of the Environment, the Department of Public Health, and the Department of Public Works. Individualized standards were placed on owners and managers of multifamily and commercial properties, food vendors, events coordinators, refuse collectors, transfer stations and processing facilities, industrial facilities and residents.

One private contractor, Recology, was given control of compost collection and processing.

Newsom hailed the ordinance as a step toward a brighter future.

"San Francisco has the best recycling and composting programs in the nation," he said. "We can build on our success."

City College of San Francisco is one of the largest participants in the new compost program. With a student, faculty and administrative population that represents

more than one-eighth of the city, CCSF's compost program is a beacon of San Francisco's greenest hopes.

But implementing the program is a monumental task.

The responsibility rests on the shoulders of the Recycling Center's small staff—an administrator, one salaried employee and a handful of volunteers.

On the east end of Ocean Campus, the recycling center sits in the shadow of the football stadium. Like a fortress, it's bunkered just below ground level and guarded by a padlocked chain link fence with a sign that reads, "Restricted Area. No Illegal Dumping."

Inside the fence, there are stacks of rusted chairs, desks with peeled paint and filing cabinets with gnarled, faded wood. Beneath a sign that reads "E-Waste," there are copy machines, computers and fax-machines, circa 1970.

Recyclables are piled in seeming chaos, like a makeshift monument to a discarded past. But it's really a beginning—

the first step toward a new life for things thrown away.

If you sit here for an hour, you might not see a soul.

Here, compost is still just an idea scratched onto paper by Carlita Martinez, the center's do-everything director.

"I hire, I fire, I train," says Martinez, clicking off tasks like letters in the alphabet. "I do state reports. I work with faculty, students and clubs. I bring all the stakeholders together, and make sure we have them on board. I determine infrastructure. I place the bins and organize pickups."

Martinez is an unusual mix of foul-mouthed waste worker and prophet for a greener future—tough and always on the move. She's known to spit a slew of "shits" and "damns" while rushing around the Ocean Campus on a golf cart, wearing the kind of orange reflective safety vest you'd find at a construction site.

Hanging on the walls of her office are a Service Employees International Union Local 1021 sign, a Tibetan prayer flag and the Tonalamatl—the divine calendar of ancient Mexico. Promotional posters, including a flyer for Introduction to Environmental Studies, cover the rest of the office from floor to ceiling.



TOP: On June 23, 2009, the city signed into law the nation's first mandate that all residents and businesses separate their recycling and compost material from trash.



LEFT: CCSF Recycling Coordinator Carlita Martinez holds up a bottle of Inman family pinot noir, a product that is made from grapevines supplemented with composted food materials, much like those recycled at City College.

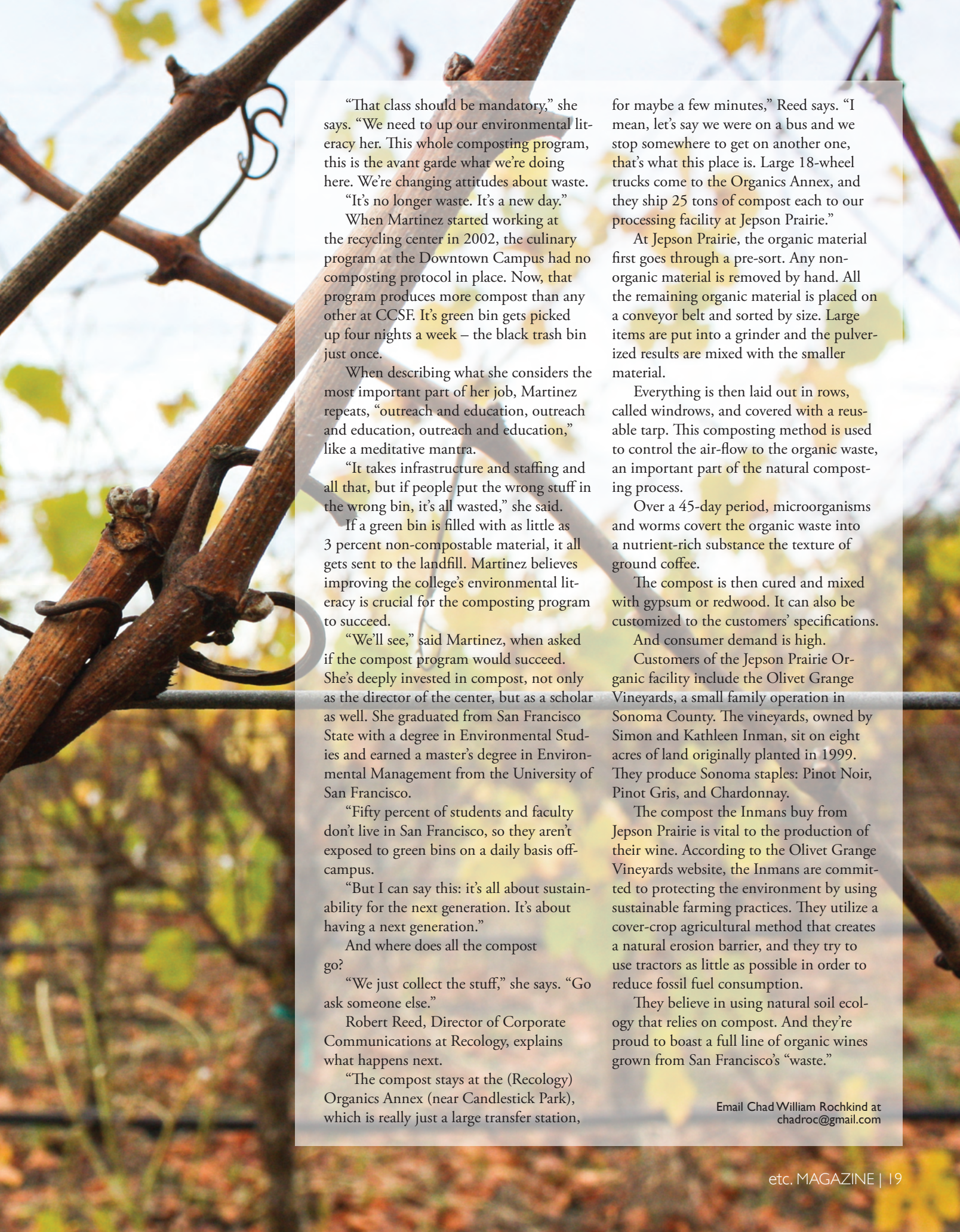


FAR LEFT: Bottles of Inman family wines are displayed on a shelf in their newly remodeled tasting room in the Russian River Valley. Each wine's unique flavoring relies on healthy soil and a natural winemaking process, which includes compost fertilization.



Only a few grapes remain on the vine after harvest at the Inman Family vineyards on Olivet Road in Santa Rosa. As they fall to the ground, the grapes will be combined with compost material as nutrients for grapes grown next season.

Photograph by Frank Ladra



“That class should be mandatory,” she says. “We need to up our environmental literacy here. This whole composting program, this is the avant garde what we’re doing here. We’re changing attitudes about waste.

“It’s no longer waste. It’s a new day.”

When Martinez started working at the recycling center in 2002, the culinary program at the Downtown Campus had no composting protocol in place. Now, that program produces more compost than any other at CCSF. It’s green bin gets picked up four nights a week – the black trash bin just once.

When describing what she considers the most important part of her job, Martinez repeats, “outreach and education, outreach and education, outreach and education,” like a meditative mantra.

“It takes infrastructure and staffing and all that, but if people put the wrong stuff in the wrong bin, it’s all wasted,” she said.

If a green bin is filled with as little as 3 percent non-compostable material, it all gets sent to the landfill. Martinez believes improving the college’s environmental literacy is crucial for the composting program to succeed.

“We’ll see,” said Martinez, when asked if the compost program would succeed. She’s deeply invested in compost, not only as the director of the center, but as a scholar as well. She graduated from San Francisco State with a degree in Environmental Studies and earned a master’s degree in Environmental Management from the University of San Francisco.

“Fifty percent of students and faculty don’t live in San Francisco, so they aren’t exposed to green bins on a daily basis off-campus.

“But I can say this: it’s all about sustainability for the next generation. It’s about having a next generation.”

And where does all the compost go?

“We just collect the stuff,” she says. “Go ask someone else.”

Robert Reed, Director of Corporate Communications at Recology, explains what happens next.

“The compost stays at the (Recology) Organics Annex (near Candlestick Park), which is really just a large transfer station,

for maybe a few minutes,” Reed says. “I mean, let’s say we were on a bus and we stop somewhere to get on another one, that’s what this place is. Large 18-wheel trucks come to the Organics Annex, and they ship 25 tons of compost each to our processing facility at Jepson Prairie.”

At Jepson Prairie, the organic material first goes through a pre-sort. Any non-organic material is removed by hand. All the remaining organic material is placed on a conveyor belt and sorted by size. Large items are put into a grinder and the pulverized results are mixed with the smaller material.

Everything is then laid out in rows, called windrows, and covered with a reusable tarp. This composting method is used to control the air-flow to the organic waste, an important part of the natural composting process.

Over a 45-day period, microorganisms and worms convert the organic waste into a nutrient-rich substance the texture of ground coffee.

The compost is then cured and mixed with gypsum or redwood. It can also be customized to the customers’ specifications.

And consumer demand is high.

Customers of the Jepson Prairie Organic facility include the Olivet Grange Vineyards, a small family operation in Sonoma County. The vineyards, owned by Simon and Kathleen Inman, sit on eight acres of land originally planted in 1999. They produce Sonoma staples: Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, and Chardonnay.

The compost the Inmans buy from Jepson Prairie is vital to the production of their wine. According to the Olivet Grange Vineyards website, the Inmans are committed to protecting the environment by using sustainable farming practices. They utilize a cover-crop agricultural method that creates a natural erosion barrier, and they try to use tractors as little as possible in order to reduce fossil fuel consumption.

They believe in using natural soil ecology that relies on compost. And they’re proud to boast a full line of organic wines grown from San Francisco’s “waste.”

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City College student Oz Litvac served in the Israeli Defense Force along the Gaza Strip southeast of Israel from 2003 to 2005, at the time considered one of the most dangerous places on Earth.

Photograph by Frank Ladra

THE WAR AT HOME

An Israeli soldier's story

By Oz Litvac

The ground shook before I heard the explosion. Moments later the shooting began. It was chaos. Bullets were flying, debris was raining down on us... we didn't know where the shots were coming from or what caused the explosion.

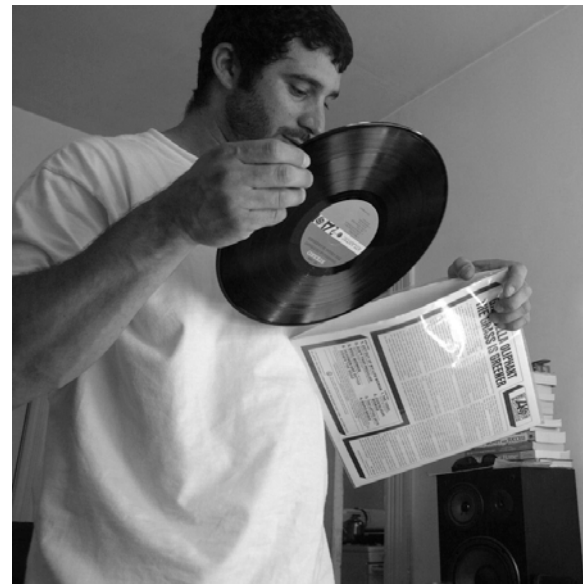
My platoon had just returned from a short weekend furlough. It was Dec. 12, 2004. We were still in dress uniform when 1.5 tons of explosives detonated inside a Hamas tunnel underneath the JVT, an Israeli outpost near the Rafah border crossing separating Egypt from Gaza.

After the explosion, Fatah and Hamas soldiers rushed out of the tunnel and started shooting. Four

Israeli soldiers died. Six suffered gunshot wounds. One was missing.

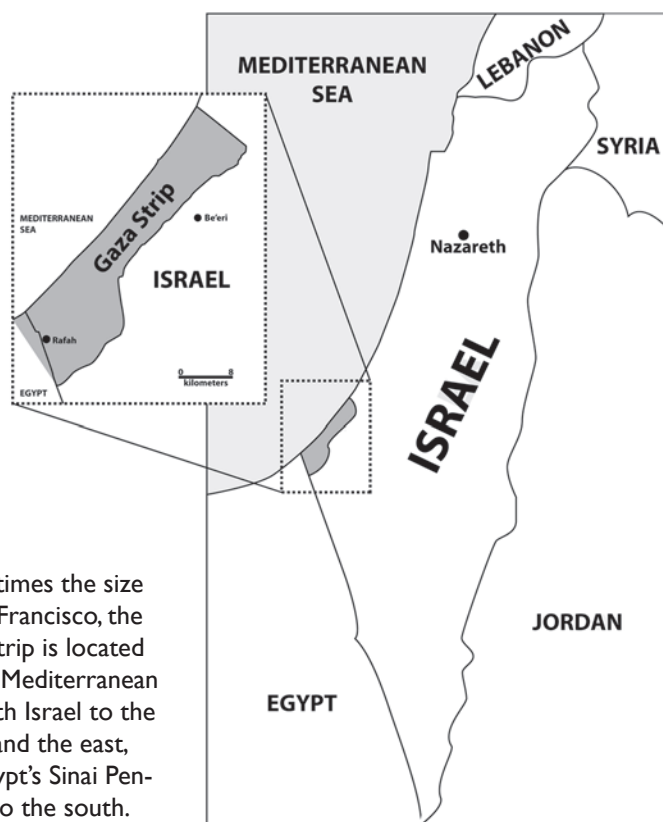
The blast left us disoriented. There were about 25 soldiers and officers running around, ducking gunfire and trying to find their gear. The sun was down, and the power was out, which made it difficult to see.

From our nearby base, six of us moved toward the JVT. Then there was another smaller explosion. Special forces arrived and sent in bomb-sniffing dogs. The IED team followed, making sure there were no live improvised explosive devices. They collected grenades from a dead Fatah soldier's body.



Photograph by John Strange

Oz Litvac sorts through his small collection of jazz and hip-hop vinyl LPs. Playing music helps him relax.



Three times the size of San Francisco, the Gaza Strip is located on the Mediterranean Sea, with Israel to the north and the east, and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula to the south.

Graphic by Shirley Edwards



Photograph courtesy of Oz Litvac

Here, at the age of 21, Litvac holds an M-16 automatic rifle as he enters his watch post along the Philadelphi Corridor in the Gaza Strip.

We entered the ruins of the JVT, stepping over chunks of concrete. Where the roof once was, we could see sky. The air was thick with dust, sand and fine debris. I must have been in shock because it seemed like the quietest moment in my life.

An officer shouted orders, but I couldn't hear him. I was preoccupied with the surreal scene. The wind was blowing gently. The smell of gunpowder, smoke and death hung in the air. It was dark and we were scattered. All I could think was: "If someone starts shooting, we're all fucked!" I figured we'd just end up shooting each other.

Andre, a soldier in my squad, helped me load the body of a Fatah soldier onto a stretcher and carry it to the ambulance. He spat on the body and cursed in Ukrainian, his native tongue. He was mad, but I didn't feel anything.

We lifted the bloody body and laid it on the stretcher. It appeared to have been hit

several times. One eye was hanging from his face. His brains were spilling out the side of his skull. His left leg was contorted, twisted in front of him unnaturally.

We spent hours digging through the rubble for our missing soldier. We found him beneath the concrete, burned beyond recognition. As we lifted the body, it began falling apart.

A phone rang under some debris. It belonged to one of our dead soldiers. As I moved some of the rubble, I could see the phone's screen. It said, "Mom."

When I reached for the phone, my lieutenant came over, grabbed me and said, "This is not your job." I walked away wondering how my mother would have felt if I had not answered her call.

Out of the many horrifying things I witnessed while in the Israeli Defense Force, the JVT attack was the most disturbing.

The people in my country do not wish for war. But it is something we face every day, while the world watches and critiques Israel's every move.

The funerals, the grieving families, the dedicated moments of silence, the candles – are all too familiar parts of life in the "land of milk and honey."

I was born in Nazareth, Israel. My parents, Romanian immigrants, served in the Israeli Air Force. We moved around a lot.

Israel is a small country – about the size of New Jersey – roughly 11,000 square miles, including the disputed territories. Most of us have witnessed an attack. We all know someone who has died or been injured. Bombings and attacks dominate the news.

As a kid, I remember how the phone lines would crash within 10 minutes after a bombing because so many family members

were calling to check on each other.

Every year, we had to upgrade our gas masks. The kids' mask was cool – it reminded me of the old American astronaut helmets.

When I turned 13, we moved to the United States. My mother did not want my sister and me to serve in the IDF, which is mandatory after high school. In 1995, we started our new life in the States with the help of friends in New Jersey. After high school, I spent a couple of years partying and working odd jobs.

But I wanted to do something more meaningful.

At the age of 20, I returned to Israel. After working for a year, I enlisted in the Israeli Defense Force in 2003 as a combat engineer.

The escalation in violence following the second intifada reminded me of my moral and ethical obligations to my birthplace.

After boot camp, I moved to Be'eri, a kibbutz about eight kilometers from the Gaza Strip. I spent the majority of my service on the strip, which is located on the Mediterranean Sea, with Israel to the north and east, and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula to the

south. It's about three times the size of San Francisco.

While stationed there, I served on an armored personnel carrier, transporting units whose sole objective was to find and destroy tunnels, like the one under the JVT. I also assisted on missions to prevent weapon smuggling.

“At the age of 20, I returned to Israel. After working for a year, I enlisted in the Israeli Defense Force in 2003 as a combat engineer.”

We frequently came under sniper fire. I celebrated my 22nd birthday inside an armored personnel carrier. On many occasions, I was confined in an APC for several days. I was constantly exposed to death.

During my time in the service, I met people from many ethnic and economic backgrounds. But our personal differences

disappeared when it mattered. Our lives depended on it.

I found an inner strength I wasn't aware of. I learned how to appreciate little things – like a cup of coffee and a cigarette. Great friendships were made. And great friends were lost.

In 2005, I was discharged from the IDF and moved back to the States. I started attending school in Sacramento. Three years later, I transferred to City College of San Francisco.

Slowly, I am getting back to normal life. School keeps me busy and, more importantly, distracts me. But I often feel stressed and cannot figure out why. Some nights, I can't sleep. At times, my nerves seem fragile.

I have awakened in cold sweats and experienced short-term memory loss – symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. But I haven't been diagnosed.

“What the mind suppresses, the body expresses,” I learned in a psychology course.

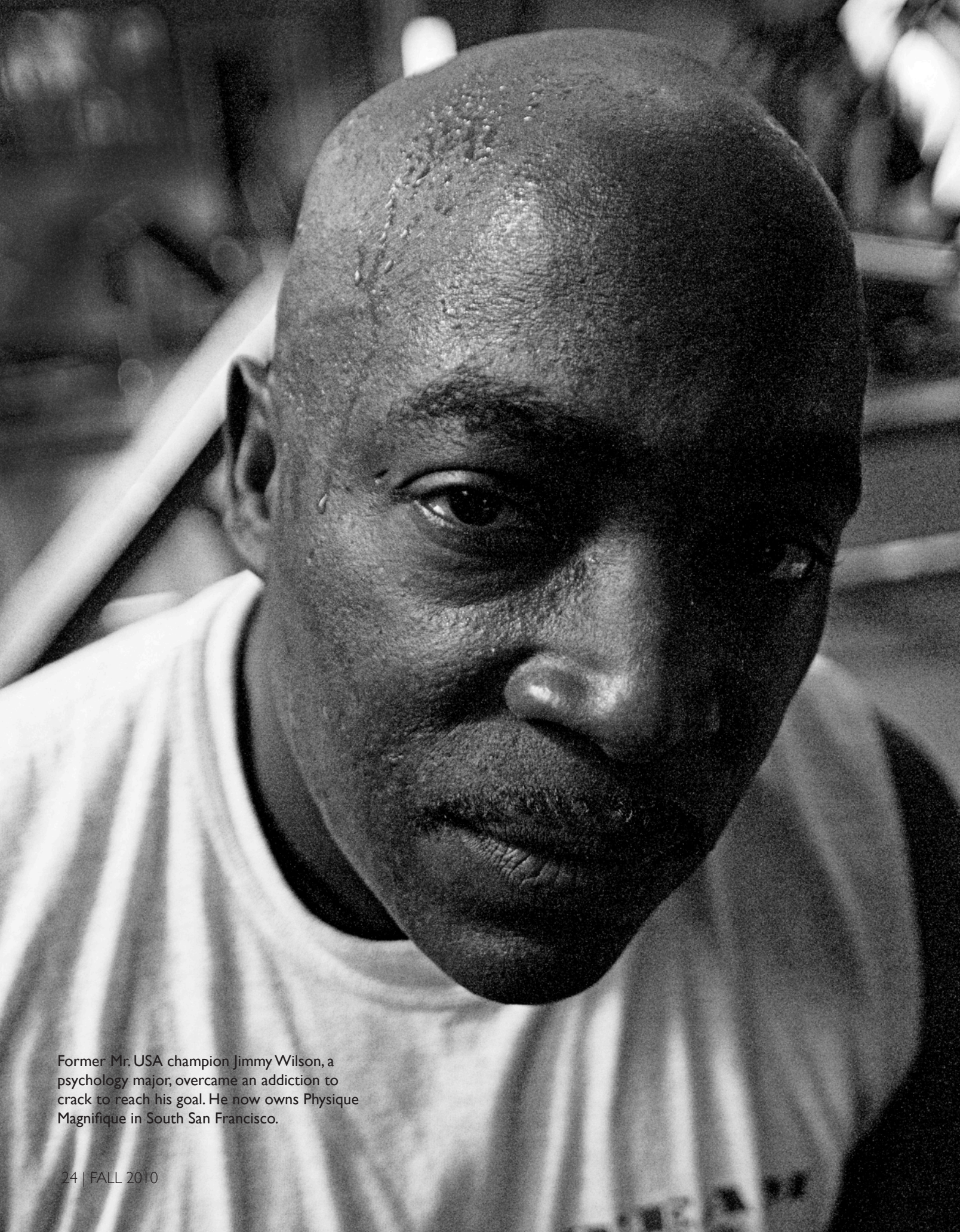
My body is only now reflecting what my mind has gone through.

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Photograph by Frank Ladra

Litvac, who has been back in the states for 5 years, says his life is slowly getting back to normal. Suffering symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress disorder, he says school keeps him busy and, more importantly, distracts him.



Former Mr. USA champion Jimmy Wilson, a psychology major, overcame an addiction to crack to reach his goal. He now owns Physique Magnifique in South San Francisco.

By Michael Condiff
Photographs by Amal Mongia

MR. USA PRESSES ON

A muscleman's uplifting journey

Outside a South San Francisco café, Jimmy Wilson eases into a patio chair and sips hot green tea.

The morning is bright, but cool. Wilson looks comfortable and solid as an anvil in black sweat pants and matching shirt, hood up. He has a youthful smile below a trim mustache, but light-framed glasses and gray at the jaw line hint at his 48 years.

A former Mr. USA bodybuilding champion, Wilson still carries 205 pounds of layered muscle on a 5-foot-5-inch frame. He speaks softly, but with confidence. When he moves, it's with the reserved energy of a coiled spring.

Only a few of the café's patrons are sitting outside and Wilson enjoys the solitude. He's

already taken his kids to school and trained two clients at Physique Magnifique, the South City gym he's co-owned for the past 14 years with his wife, Futaba Takashima.

Wilson has more clients to train today, more kids to chauffeur. He also has a psychology class at City College, where for the past two years he's been working toward a degree.

He takes another sip of tea. The baristas and many of the patrons greet him warmly and by first name. One man walks over to shake Wilson's hand.

"Hey, Jim," the man says. "How's it going today?"

Wilson smiles.

"Blessed," he says. "Life is good.">>

It wasn't always so.

Before he was Mr. USA – before he had the gorgeous, fitness-competitor wife and the two beautiful kids and the successful business and the home in San Bruno—Wilson had next to nothing.

He was a crack addict –alone and jobless in Los Angeles.

"I knew what I was getting into the first time I smoked crack," he said. "I knew crack's reputation, what it had done to people. But, I thought, 'Man, I'm Jimmy Wilson. I'm from Hunter's Point. I'm young and I'm strong. Crack can't conquer me.'"

"I was wrong. It did."

Born in San Francisco in 1962, Wilson was raised in the Sunnydale projects, Bayview, and the Fillmore.

As a child, he had asthma – was sometimes hospitalized as a result of the chronic airway disease—and was not allowed to play competitive sports. Seeking a way to increase his physical strength and self-esteem, he was inspired by workout ads in comic books and wrestling magazines.

He started with two 5-pound dumbbells, a pair of hand grips, a jump rope and a set of springs. When people began to notice his body changing, he redoubled his efforts. Weightlifting became his passion.

Entering teen bodybuilding events in 1978, he won his first titles in 1980. A sweep of the Mr. Teen Northern California, Mr. Teen Western America and Mr. Teen Western USA competitions in 1981 convinced him to turn pro.

In 1982, at the age of 20, he joined

L.A.'s bodybuilding community at Gold's Gym and Muscle Beach, determined to make a splash.

Instead, Wilson found himself drowning in addiction.

"You can't train 24 hours a day," Wilson said. "When I wasn't in the gym, I was just kind of floating around, hanging out in the wrong places. I got caught up smoking crack, and it took me so low, I can remember being down on the floor looking at pieces of lint, thinking, 'Maybe this is something I can smoke.'"

Wilson's addiction eroded his self-esteem and compromised his training. In 1984, he finished a disappointing seventh in the middleweight division of Mr. USA. He was not going to turn pro, or eke out a living, finishing seventh.

"There was a time when I thought about suicide," Wilson said. "I was lost."

After failing to pay rent for several months, he returned one evening to find an eviction notice on his door. Inside, the apartment was filthy and reeking. Wilson had a 30-pound pit bull terrier that he hadn't walked in days. In protest, the powerful animal shredded a 5-inch-thick county phone book and deposited several piles of shit in the living room.

As Wilson moved deeper into the apartment, he passed an open bathroom door... and stopped in horror.

"I hadn't really looked at myself in a long time. But there in the mirror, I looked like a monster. My hair was messed up and going everywhere. My clothes were shabby. My physique was gone. I had lost so much

weight, my face was drawn in. I looked like a coat rack, like I was seriously sick. And I was."

He ran to the bedroom, fell face down on the rumpled sheets and started praying. Eventually, he cried himself to sleep.

"Bawled like a baby," he said.

The next morning, he began the process of changing his life.

"I woke up and said, 'OK, Jim. Start simple and move to complex. What's the first thing you can do to get your life back?'"

The answer? Take a shower.

"I really stunk."

Wilson moved back to the Bay Area. He lived for a short time with his father in Richmond and then his mother in Daly City. He found work as a delivery driver and a security guard, but couldn't shake the disappointment of what happened in Los Angeles.

He returned to an old haunt, Weight City Gym in South San Francisco, and ran into friend and former training partner, Paul Mendez.

"You could see that Jimmy had been through some tough times," said Mendez. Still one of Wilson's closest friends, Mendez is a transitional studies counselor with San Francisco State, serving as a liaison between the university and City College.

"He had a lot of frustration inside him, a lot of disappointment."

Wilson told Mendez about Los Angeles, about the crack and the thoughts of suicide. Mendez never interrupted.

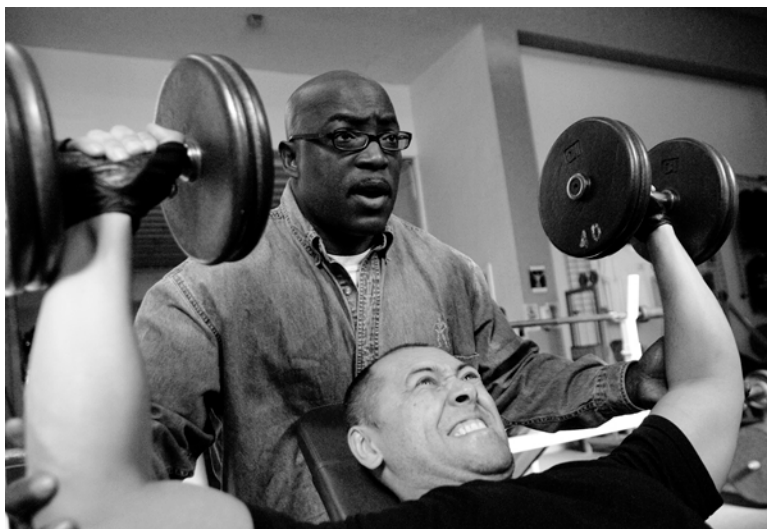
"He just sort of took it all in," Wilson said. "And then suddenly, Paul just slammed his palm down and said, 'Jim, what are YOU going to do?' It was a powerful thing, coming from Paul, who's usually a real quiet guy. It wasn't 'How can I help?' or 'I think you should do this or that.' It was, 'Jim, what are YOU going to do?'"

"That sort of kicked me in the ass."

Wilson picked up shifts at the gym, sweeping, cleaning up. For a time, he used an empty upstairs room as an apartment. He started working out again. Physique and confidence returning, he became a personal trainer. His knowledge and enthusiasm attracted a growing list of clients.

One of them was Takashima, a Japa-

"Jimmy has a great ability to connect with people," a friend said. "He understands that he has a responsibility to give back..."



nese-born, internationally-raised interior designer and interpreter. Over the course of several years, they became good friends, then training partners. Eventually, they began dating.

"I was impressed by how positive he was – Jim's always looking to inspire people and be inspired," said Takashima, who graduated from Tokyo-based International Christian University with a sociology degree. "For a long time, I didn't really know too much about his life in Los Angeles. You couldn't really see that in him. He was moving in a different direction."

Wilson began thinking about a return to bodybuilding. But, he had not competed since that 7th-place finish at the 1984 Mr. USA. Wanting to ease back in, he joined a friend at the Mr. USA Mixed Pairs Bodybuilding Championships in 1991. The duo finished second.

Emboldened, Wilson entered the 1992 Mr. Northern California competition, and won the middleweight and overall titles. Two weeks later, on the Mr. USA stage in Los Angeles, where he had once experienced so much disappointment, Wilson made the final five.

As the judges continued to eliminate competitors, Wilson found himself in the final pair with friend Randall Samuels, who had finished second to Wilson's seventh in 1984.

After a three-minute, side-by-side pose down, bodybuilding legend Chris Dickerson raised Wilson's arm in victory. On the judge's scorecards, he was one point shy of a perfect score. A photo of the moment, along with Flex Magazine's coverage of the event, rests prominently among the numerous bodybuilding memorabilia that line the walls of Physique Magnifique.

"I can't say I knew I was going to win, but I was confident," Wilson said. "I had done everything the right way: my diet, my training. I had my posing down. If I hadn't won, I would have been disappointed, but I could have lived with it. I knew I had done everything I could."

Mendez, who trained Wilson for the event, said, "It was a great moment, very emotional. He earned it, put all the work in. He came back from a place a lot of people never come back from."

The victory furthered Wilson's belief in

self – "I have more power in the way my life turns out than I think sometimes," he says – and inspired him to chase another dream: music.

Always a fan of songs with political and social angles, Wilson had been penning rap lyrics that illustrated his view of the world. When Takashima encouraged him to enter



Photograph courtesy of Jimmy Wilson

On the stage in Los Angeles, Wilson was crowned Mr. USA in 1992 after judges gave him a near perfect score.

a local environmental rap competition, Wilson's song "Genocidal Suicide" finished second and grabbed the attention of event organizers with its vivid lyrics:

"Original man livin' with nature and animals

In love, peace and harmony – then came the cannibals

Corruption – created everything mechanical

Dismantled the planet, tried to command it, now it's flammable...

The water's contaminated, they claim it's purified

It's more like liquefied genocidal suicide..."

Wilson was offered studio time to record a demo and began performing under the name AK Black. He was invited to the first National Peoples of Color Environ-

mental Leadership Summit in Washington D.C. and then began touring with other socially conscious artists. Within two weeks of Jimmy Wilson's victory at Mr. USA, AK Black was on stage in Europe.

"Music became an outlet for a different side of me," Wilson said. "It let me tell my story – my vision of how the world was, how I thought it could be. My physique gave me a presence that would make people notice, especially young people. I wanted to use that to try to reach them."

Through a friendship with Ray Fong, a counselor in the EOPS Second Chance program at City College, Wilson also began speaking to different at-risk groups.

"Jimmy has a great ability to connect with people," Fong said. "He understands that he has a responsibility to give back to the community and he embraces that."

Wilson performed as AK Black for 11 years, touring with other socially aware artists like the Pearl Ubungen Dancers and Musicians, Piri Thomas, Quincy Troupe, Genny Lim, Francis Wong and Midnight Voices.

In 1997, he began pursuing other interests: having a family, buying a home and owning a business. He married Takashima and the couple had their first child, a daughter named Sayaka, which means "refreshing" in Japanese.

Two years later, the young family welcomed a son, Masai, an African term for "warrior." Both children have African, Japanese and Muslim names, and at Wilson's insistence, also carry their mother's surname.

Also in 1997, Wilson and Takashima purchased the home they still occupy in San Bruno. And, they bought and renovated the old Weight City Gym in South San Francisco, renaming it Physique Magnifique.

"That was a busy year," Wilson said.

In 2008, Wilson began attending City College, with an eye toward working in the juvenile justice system.

"I don't know if it's something I'll use, but I figure it's better to have it and not need it than to need it and not have it," Wilson says.

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BATTLING BACK

While in the Army, Colby Buzzell began writing a blog that eventually became the award-winning book “My War: Killing Time in Iraq.” He’s written for Esquire and was named by the magazine as one of the “Best and Brightest of 2007.” He’s been featured on “This American Life” and been interviewed on CNN and FOX News. The following package offers two perspectives – a feature profile about Buzzell, and his first-person story about how the GI Bill and City College’s Veterans Resource Center have made a difference in his life.

IRAQ VET AIMS TO WRITE WRONGS

By Erin Hurley • Photograph by Yoni Klein

Colby Buzzell is an intimidating-looking man—tall and muscular, with a stern face and a constantly furrowed brow. In the author photo for his book, “My War: Killing Time in Iraq,” Buzzell is still sporting the shaved head of an Army man. His intense stare is focused on the camera, arms crossed in front of him, revealing muscles and a pin-up girl tattoo on his forearm.

Buzzell was 26 when he joined the army. Before the war, he says, “My life was boring. I was living in the Richmond, paying \$800 a month and valet-parking cars at night.” In his book, he writes, “I didn’t want to get all old and have my bratty grandkids ask me, ‘Grandpa, where were you during the Iraq war?’ and me going ‘Oh, I was busy doing temp work and data entry for 12 bucks an hour.’”

“It was right after 9/11 and everyone was out for blood,” he says. “At the time all the soldiers wanted to be there. Things are different now, though. The ‘rah-rah’ has died off.”

Buzzell was stationed in Northern Iraq, near Mosul. He served in the Stryker Brigade as a

machine gunner, or “trigger puller,” as he likes to call it. In 2003, about eight months into his deployment he started writing a blog—*cbftw.blogspot.com*, short for “Colby Buzzell Fuck The War.” He wrote his blog on computers in Iraqi Internet cafes, while other soldiers were lifting weights, playing video games and smoking cigarettes.

He says he was motivated mainly by boredom, but also by the kind of catharsis that writing provides. He insists that he’s always been a big reader but associated writing mainly with people in college. His tone in person matches his tone in the book—contemptuous, wily, difficult to pin down.

When he began keeping a blog about his experiences as an infantryman for the U.S. Army, he says, “no one else was doing it.” As he started to receive attention for his writing, he was warned by a commanding officer to “be careful what you say.” Buzzell listened. “I didn’t want to get in trouble. I was in the army to be in the army, not to be a writer.” >>

Buzzell was 26 when he joined the army. In 2003, about eight months into his deployment, he started writing a blog about his war experiences.

After locking eyes with the enemy, shooting and killing potentially innocent people, Buzzell said, “I was smoking like a chimney, my nerves were completely shot. I was emotionally drained and noticed that my hands were still kinda shaking.”

Photograph courtesy of Colby Buzzell



After his discharge from the army in January of 2005, Buzzell was courted by 10 different publishers. He chose Berkeley Press, a division of Penguin Books. Adapted from his blog, “My War: Killing Time in Iraq,” has since been translated into seven languages. It has received praise from Kurt Vonnegut and Henry Rollins, frontman of the punk band Black Flag, whose song gave the book its title. In September of 2005, Buzzell appeared on National Public Radio’s “This American Life,” as a part of a panel of soldier-bloggers.

In 2007 Buzzell’s memoir won a Lulu Blooker Prize for best book based on a blog or website. His book beat out over 110 entries from 15 countries and received a grand prize of \$10,000. In 2006, the only other year the prize was awarded, Julie Powell won a Blooker for her blog “Julie and Julia,” which later became a major motion picture.

With “My War,” he says he was hoping to write a book “for everyone else” - a book that anyone could read and, after doing so, have some understanding of the war in Iraq.

Although his outspoken commentary on the war is what made him famous, Buzzell, 34, is now rather tight-lipped on the subject of Iraq. He describes the country as “just interesting,” the Iraqi people simply as “friendly.” “They thanked us for being over there,” he said. Nevertheless, “I spent the whole time over there wishing I was back at home.”

The war has left Buzzell with post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, one in seven soldiers returning from Iraq

suffers from this condition. Symptoms include difficulty concentrating and feelings of detachment. When describing the fighting in Iraq, he will only say that there was “a lot of confusion. You’re scared out of your mind.”

In the popular “Men in Black” passage from his book Buzzell describes a heated confrontation – locking eyes with the enemy, shooting and killing potentially innocent people. Afterwards, he said, “I was smoking like a chimney, my nerves were completely shot. I was emotionally drained and noticed that my hands were still kinda shaking.” He went off by himself to think and be alone, until his sergeant came to check on him.

Buzzell says, “I told him about how I was kinda trippin’ out about how not everybody I engaged had a weapon in their hand and that I wasn’t really too sure about what happened to some of those people.”

The sergeant passed down some advice that his father, who had fought in Vietnam, had given him: “Put all the things that bother you and keep you awake at night and clog your head up, put all those things in a shoebox. Put the lid on it, and deal with it later.”

Buzzell says he did just that – he put the memories in a box and hasn’t opened it since. Still, he claims he has no regrets about enlisting. He admits that his answer might be different if he had ever been seriously injured. He considers himself lucky to be alive.

Buzzell brightens and shows considerably more interest when the subject changes to his writing career. He has contributed articles to Esquire magazine about

the homeless in San Francisco’s Tenderloin neighborhood, as well his take on the 2008 State of the Union Address.

Although he was named one of Esquire’s “Best and Brightest of 2007,” he says, “I have to write a lot more before I can consider myself a writer.” He values brevity, directness, and “an adventurous attitude” in writers he admires, like Tom Wolfe, Charles Bukowski, and Hunter S. Thompson.

Buzzell is now focusing on his studies at City College. It is his first experience as a full-time college student. He says that the structure of school has helped him in his transition out of the military. His tuition is being paid for by the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which he says is “like having a rich uncle pay for your education.”

He talks excitedly about his classes in history, English and journalism. “I’m really getting carried away with assignments, writing more than what’s required.” He speaks of devouring textbooks and is spending a lot of time in the campus bookstore.

“Now this is a true story,” he says. “I was in the campus bookstore, flipping through textbooks, and I came across one of my stories (an excerpt from “My War”) in the Norton Anthology of English Literature.

Buzzell is animated. “Not to sound too ‘Good Will Hunting’-ish, but I had this epiphany. I’ve got to stick with it. I can’t quit.”

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THE COSTS AND BENEFITS OF WAR

By Colby Buzzell • Photographs by Yoni Klein

On the third floor of Cloud Hall, the line outside the financial aid office stretches down the hallway and around the corner. I walk right on by the have-nots and into the Veterans Resource Center. Thanks to my Uncle Sam, my college is going to be paid for.

All of it.

Believe it or not, I actually volunteered for the infantry back in 2002. I guess you could say things had gotten so bad for me that enlisting in the military during wartime sounded like a really good idea.

Now, I'm finally cashing in the lottery ticket I've kept in my back pocket ever since I got out of the military. The one labeled "Post-9/11 GI Bill."

In July 2008, the Post-9/11 GI Bill was signed into law, creating a new educational benefit program to replace the World War II-era GI Bill of Rights. The new bill went into effect Aug. 1, 2009, and provides veterans with aid to help them attend a college or university.

It includes tuition, a stipend for books and supplies and – most importantly – a very sexy housing allowance.



Buzzell, a successful author and freelancer, has been published in Esquire magazine. The benefits he receives from his Post-9/11 GI Bill allow him to attend school and pursue his writing career.

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, the housing allowance is determined using the location of the school you attend. In San Francisco, a city with one of the highest costs of living in the country, that translates to the sound of “cha-ching.”

I was aiming high. I wanted to transfer to a University of California school. My counselor at City College drew up a two-year plan and instructed me to attend class, apply myself and get good grades. Checks would arrive in the mail shortly.

Thanking him enthusiastically, I could feel my spirits lift. It had been a long time since I felt this good. In a way, my country was sending me a thank-you card. I threw

The first day on campus brought many flashbacks. Not of the war, but of high school and basic training. I was convinced this was the biggest mistake of my life.

on my sunglasses and thought to myself, “This is how life should be.”

But that feeling was short-lived.

The first day on campus brought many flashbacks. Not of the war, but of high school and basic training. I was convinced this was the biggest mistake of my life.

As I made my way through the vaudeville on campus, a student wearing sandals asked if I had rolling papers. Another called me “yo dog” when requesting a cigarette.

Nearby, students crowded around a table, endorsing petitions for the legalization of marijuana. But no one visited the little table set up by anti-war activists.

Sprinkled within this mosh pit of students were other veterans. I’m not talking one or two, five or six, but many. It felt as if I were back on post again.

Most students on campus are probably oblivious to veterans. To the untrained eye they blend in quite well. But just as gay people have a gaydar and can pick up on other gay people, other vets can do the same.



“Everywhere I turned, I’d see a vet. Either he’d spot me, or I’d spot him,” Buzzell said of his experience on campus. Some would say “What unit were you with?”, or, “When were you over there?”

There are little clues that only we can pick up, such as the way we carry ourselves and the language we use.

Everywhere I turned, I’d see a vet. Either he’d spot me, or I’d spot him. A slight glance over, followed by a subtle head nod. Some would even say “hello” and ask, “What unit were you with?” or, “When

were you over there?” It was with the same enthusiasm that ex-patriots use in a foreign country when bumping into someone from their native land.

I was starting to feel something here at City College, but I wasn’t quite sure what that feeling was – yet.

In the Veterans Resource Center, the VA Medical Center has an office set up to assist vets. Two psychologists and two psychiatrists are on staff, ready and eager to help.

Spence Casey, a social worker at the VRC, told me the goal is to register veterans into the VA system. Sadly, many of them walk into the office saying, "I didn't even know I had benefits."

"The GI Bill is such a positive benefit that it's a great time for returning veterans to get back into school," he said. "It's good to be involved, rather than sitting around at home. ... Being engaged (on) some level is a great thing."

The VRC provides social support and counseling for veterans matriculating into the school. Veterans found to need more thorough treatment may be referred to the VA hospital or one of the outreach clinics.

The resource center also includes a classroom converted into a lounge. This room became my sanctuary between classes. I don't know if I could have made the transition as easily if it weren't available.

There is free coffee by the door, a refrigerator, five brand-new computers with Internet access, tables, chairs, a sofa and love seats in front of a flat-screen television mounted on the wall.

On the table by the back wall are fliers from various organizations to help veterans: the San Francisco Vet Center, Swords to Plowshares, the Employment Development Department and more.

There are resource books, BART schedules and a telephone for any angry vet who wants to call the VA and strike up a colorful conversation about the status of his or her benefits.

In the lounge, you'll find people of all ethnicities, male and female, who have served in the military. They come from all over the country. Many heard that vets are treated well here, so they transferred.

Jordan Towers, a Marine who served in Iraq, is one of the many welcoming faces I frequently see in the veterans lounge.

"It's been strange. Awkward. That's the best way I can describe it," he said of his transition back to school. "I'm just now getting in the loop and getting comfortable. But still, most of the people I talk to are vets. I don't really have too many civil-

ian friends."

Towers was one of the leading forces who helped get the ball rolling on both the veterans lounge and the on-campus club, the Veterans Alliance.

"After I got out, I tried to go to counseling at the vet center in Sacramento," he said. "They told me that it'd be three months before I could sit down and talk with someone. I thought that was bullshit,

It's kind of a proud feeling seeing all these veterans going back to school and getting educations. It really does give me hope seeing the Iraq and Afghanistan generation of veterans flooding the school systems. Only time will tell what positives come from it.

so I figured if we joined together and built a group, we could advocate for better counseling."

I asked him if he has noticed more vets since his first semester here. A smile came across his face.

"Oh yeah, a lot more."

In spring 2009, there were 150 enrolled veterans here. For fall 2010, just over 500.

Ian Gibbs, a student in my U.S. history class, got out of the Navy in 2007. I asked him if he missed the military.

"I miss the professionalism of the military," he said. "I mean, we're in that class, right, and I see somebody sleeping on the fucking desk. And if I was the teacher, I would have kicked that desk and been like, 'Get the fuck out! You don't want to be here? Fine, don't waste my time.'"

His advice for me was to stick with it and not give up.

Jose Arias, who served in the Army, relates the military to school. Instead of officers and sergeants telling him what to do, he now has professors.

"Instead of putting on my uniform, I'm putting on jeans," he said. "I have to see it with the same amount of discipline in order for me to succeed. Instead of fighting the war on terror, like I did before, (I'm) now working on my own personal goal, which is getting my degree."

For Richard Pelote, who served six years

in the Air Force, the GI Bill has become a form of life support.

"Your savings can only go so far," he said. "Finding work, even minor jobs – like fast food jobs and jobs I'd never even considered taking before... You can't even get those jobs... even as a veteran. For the last couple months I've been trying to get work, so that I could have the GI Bill and some (extra) money. But, I can't. If I didn't have

the GI Bill, there'd be no way."

It's kind of a proud feeling seeing all these veterans going back to school and getting educations. It really does give me hope seeing the Iraq and Afghanistan generation of veterans flooding the school systems. Only time will tell what positives come from it.

It had been awhile since I hung out with my sister. When I saw her, I said that for the first time since being back from the war, it felt like I was home. I told her going to school has been somewhat therapeutic for me and that I was going to continue until I finish.

Then, my sister brought up our mother. She died from cancer the year before. She didn't get to see me go back to school. All she witnessed toward the end was the years I spent as a drunk after leaving the military.

"Mom always wanted you to quit drinking," my sister said. "And she always wanted you to go back to school."

It hit me then.

What I was doing had been high on my mom's list of wishes for me. My heart filled with regret. I should have done all of this much sooner.

My sister looked at me.

"Mom would be proud."

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Street Student

The challenge of doing homework without a home

By Casey Davin

Editor's note: According to a 2007 study by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, an estimated 3.5 million people experience homelessness in a given year. The study was based on a national survey of homeless providers. Since many homeless persons do not utilize service providers, the true number is likely higher.

In San Francisco, the homeless population is estimated between 7,000 and 10,000. At City College, the Homeless-At Risk-Transitional Students Program (HARTS) served more than 170 students this fall.

In August, 38-year-old Casey Davin began chronicling his experience as a homeless student for *Etc.* magazine. He provided editors with a rough draft in early October... and then disappeared. Efforts to locate him were unsuccessful.

We think Casey's story is powerful and important – so we are publishing his original draft. The story is his. Limited editing has been done, and only for the sake of readability.

“Nine-one-one. What's your emergency?”
“I need an ambulance.”

Sobbing, soaking wet, violently shivering from the cold and the 40 Norcos I've just swallowed – I think I am dying.

Originally, that was my intent. But now... I want to live, or at least give myself another chance. If I die, then I die. But if I make it, well then, shit....

For now, I just need help.

While the unemployment rate holds around 9.5 percent, tuition in many schools is rising. So is the population of starving students who are strapped for cash and even homeless. I am one of them.

After an off-road motorcycle accident in 2008 left me critically injured, I became unemployed and subsequently homeless. It didn't help that I was a drug addict as well. It probably wouldn't surprise you to know that life for me has gone through some pretty traumatic, dramatic and problematic changes. I struggle just to survive.

For now, I am off the streets, but legally

I don't ever want to feel comfortable living on the streets. I have had enough. I don't know whether I'm getting older and wiser or just plain old. I discovered my first gray hairs recently, and was actually stoked about it.

considered “sheltered” homeless. I have a temporary place to stay. I reside in Walden House, an 80-room transitional residence on the corner of Hayes and Fillmore. It's nothing to call home. But I am sheltered.

Unsheltered homeless are adults, children and youth sleeping in places not meant for human habitation. This includes – but is not limited to – streets, parks, alleys, parking ramps, parts of the highway system, transportation depots and other parts of transportation systems. As well as abandoned houses, buildings and stairwells, vehicles and other similar places. At one time or another, I have fit all those criteria.

But today, I live at Walden House with

around 90 other drug fiends, convicted felons and the occasional “normal” person with just an alcohol problem.

Me? I'm a hope-to-die dope fiend.

In early April of this year I had come to San Francisco after my second stint at a psych hospital in Cerritos, CA. The hospital purchased a train ticket for me under the pretense that my family would take me back in. These types of hospitals will not discharge you unless you have a confirmed place to go. They don't want you back on the streets.

So I left that place and came to the city, swallowed a bunch of Norco's and headed to Oakland. I figured that any psych ward in the city would not only be overpopulated, but run down as well. It was pouring rain. I had a backpack and a suitcase on rollers stuffed with everything I owned. I was trying to get to a hospital in San Leandro that I had been to before in 2004 after a suicide attempt. I had no money. I was hungry. I had spent that last 48 hours pumping all kinds of drugs into my system, trying to wreck myself, not caring about the consequences.

Part of me knew that if I survived I needed to get off the streets. I was somewhere in Oakland and just started walking toward the hills, wandering, swallowing pill after pill. Soaking wet, crying my heart out, shivering violently from the cold temperature.

I found a pay phone and dialed 9-1-1. “What is your emergency?” she said. “I need an ambulance for a drug overdose... For myself,” I replied.

At this point I really started to cry, cuz I knew something was over. I was going to get help.

Today, I am freshman in college and

writing an article for Etc. magazine. I am happy today. This is the why I want to live. I can honestly say today that I care about my life. Because I tried to die, I have a life today.

Living at Walden House, my days are pretty-much structured. Wake up at 6:30, eat breakfast. All the meals are relatively good. For the first time in my life, I'm actually trying to lose weight.

Med call is at 7 a.m. I'm still on a heavy regimen of medication for constant and chronic pain, nerve damage and depression.

The program is often referred to as a "self help" program. I came from the streets. And although I chose a risky path to get here, I am taking charge of my life, helping myself. There is a method here to their madness. It's about showing up, learning to keep a schedule and changing your behaviors. Learning the ability to stay. To stick with something once you have started. "Don't change one thing, change everything," as they say.

You have to ask permission to do just about everything in the house. From going across the street to the store to lying down for a rest, or even to do homework. School is not a priority for clients at Walden House. In fact, I had to get special permission to even take the classes I am taking. That was a shock to me. I'm not used to, nor do I want to get used to, asking permission for everything, least of all positive decisions for my life and future. Don't get me wrong...I have support from staff. They genuinely seem proud of me. It's just still hard for me to not only adjust to this way of living, but to juggle school and my own personal struggles along with it.

Life for me today is pretty amazing, all things considered. A fellow resident said, "I'd rather be miserable here than miserable out there," as he pointed toward the street.

I don't ever want to feel comfortable living on the streets. I have had enough. I don't know whether I'm getting older and wiser or just plain old. I discovered my first gray hairs recently, and was actually stoked

about it. I am relatively happy now, no longer having suicidal thoughts. I can only hope to stay that way. Faith man! Faith. Anyway a complete one-eighty from where I was just seven and a half months ago.

For years now I have been toying with the idea of going to school. Before my accident, I just knew I wouldn't be able to go



Photograph courtesy of Donna Hennell

City College's Homeless-At Risk-Transitional Students Program served more than 170 students this semester. Casey Davin, 38, was one of them.

to school and work full time. I never even looked into it. I just figured that school just wasn't in the cards.

I'm getting older, so that started becoming an excuse. Same way I feel about having children. I want them desperately; I just don't think it's going to happen. The kid thing is really out of my hands. If I'm lucky – and I mean lucky – it'll happen. Something I truly hope and pray for.

But education is something I have complete control over. It took the opportunity here at Walden House for me to realize this goal. It has been one of the most rewarding

decisions I've made in my life.

I pulled off signing up for financial aid on the last day. I got an amazing amount of help from the staff. Without their help I most certainly would not have been able to pull it off. I would have left. No doubt in my mind. I would've given up...OK with just making the effort to get out there.

Anyway, after that I just kept on taking the next step. I kind of came up with a new way of thinking. You know it's sometimes overwhelming, at least for me, to think about all the stuff I have to do. All the steps required to accomplish just about anything. I usually give up.

But lately, I just take the next step. Whatever it is, I don't care what it is, I'm pretty sure I can handle just simply the next step. So that is where I'm at today. Although this whole writing thing is proving to be a pretty big challenge. Fuck it, though. Just take the next step, Casey!!!!

I can tell you that since I've started here at City College of San Francisco I've never felt better. I have a sense of accomplishment. Just simply going to school....

November 8 is my last day at Walden House. What's in store for me? I hope I can just concentrate on school. I hope life doesn't get in my way. I hope I make it this time. I trust I've found a better way.

Editor's note: *As Etc. magazine was going to print in late November, we discovered Casey had checked himself into the Cherry Hill Detox Center in San Leandro. He was expected to spend Thanksgiving with his mother, Donna Hennell, and then attempt to enter a rehabilitation program in Oakland.*

"We love Casey, but will not be enablers anymore," Ms. Hennell said. "We're trying to make him grow up and face his demons. We just won't facilitate his constant abuse of his body."

When contacted, Casey said he remained hopeful of turning his life around and attending City College again in the not-too-distant future.

Good for you, Casey. Just take the next step.

Blind Faith

continued from page 15

tools, negotiate busy city streets and take care of himself. He developed confidence and became independent.

His life changed dramatically when his shop teacher, Everett Whitney, organized a camping and water skiing trip to Don Pedro Reservoir in the Sierra foothills.

The first day Harry failed to get up on his skis after repeated attempts. On the second day, as he bobbed in the lake, gripping a rope handle, a calm came over him.

"Suddenly I saw a golden horizon of light in my mind like a rainbow," he says. "I yelled, 'Hit it' and the boat took off.

He felt the wind and spray and speed – and was exhilarated.

"God answered my prayers with a long rope and a pair of skis," he says.

Afterward, he felt he could do anything. And he was willing to try anything. From then on, he says, the suffocating grip of blindness loosened each time he mastered a new sport or hobby.

Even if you have a disability, he says, "Don't be afraid to try."

His sister says, "Harry's biggest contribution was his setting an example for other blind people."

Mike McAviney, his best friend, met Cordellos at the Orientation Center for the Blind in '58. Cordellos encouraged him to participate in athletic activities.

"I always consider him my hero," says McAviney, the first blind man accepted in the Peace Corps.

In 2002, McAviney nominated Cordellos to carry the Olympic Torch through San Francisco. He wrote an essay on "Who's your hero?" and entered it in a contest.

McAviney's essay won and Cordellos was chosen to run the torch from the corner of Polk and North Point to Franklin. In 1984, he also carried the Olympic torch down Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles.

After they had lost touch for 17 years, Cordellos and McAviney reunited at a ski school for the blind in Colorado. "Divine intervention brought us back together," Cordellos says.

Neither man was planning on attend-

ing the ski school because they were too busy, but each had a brush with death that changed their mind. Miraculously, McAviney walked away from a plane crash. And Cordellos had fallen through a sidewalk freight elevator shaft outside his office. He remembers a giant hand grabbing him by the collar.

The man jerked him out of the hole onto the sidewalk, saying in a shaky voice, "The elevator is at the bottom. You would have died." The bottom was 80 feet down.

As the first blind student to attend City College full-time, Cordellos broke through many disability barriers. He received an A in photography.

He described his unusual method to a reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle this way:

"To center the building, I tapped against my fiberglass cane. I could tell when I was directly in front of it by the way the sound bounced off."

He gauged exposure settings by the sun's warmth, adjusting for overcast days.

"Outdoor exposure (was) no problem for me," he said, "but indoors I just had to turn on all the lights and assume a constant amount of light."

He says he is not in the dark, though.

"I see what a sighted person sees behind their head. Color pictures from my imagination and memories from when I could see."

He graduated from Cal State Hayward with a bachelor's degree in science and a master's in physical education.

Cordellos has co-authored three books, "Breaking Through," his autobiography (Anderson World publishing), "No Limits," a biography published by Gurus Press, and a textbook titled "Aquatic Recreation for the Blind" (American Alliance for Health). All are also available in Braille.

In his darkened workshop, a converted garage, Cordellos' hands are his eyes. It's nerve-racking watching him cut through 2x4s with a Craftsman 10-inch radial saw.

He wears goggles – not for safety, but to protect his prosthetic eyes, which cost \$2,500 each.

He also wears goggles when he swims.

"I have to wear them in the ocean so

my eyes don't fall out," Cordellos says. "In the pool I can have someone get them off the bottom, but in the ocean, I'd never find them."

He's been to most of the amusement parks around the country – including Great America, Six Flags Magic Mountain and Knotts Berry Farm. On roller coasters and Tilt-A-Whirls, which he calls "tilt-a-hurl," Cordellos can ride for 30 minutes without getting sick.

"Only people who can see get sick on those rides," he says.

The septuagenarian's race times are slowing down, and he avoids 3-meter springboard diving because it's too hard on his body. He no longer has the physical strength for competitive open ocean swimming.

But his schedule has not let up. He now prefers half marathons and bowling tournaments. To avoid boredom and the confinement of blindness, he's constantly on the move.

In December, he spoke to high school students in Washington D.C. and ran the White Rock half marathon in Dallas. In January, he'll compete in the 10K "Ski for Light" cross-country competition in British Columbia.

He also plans to participate in the 100th Bay to Breakers in May.

Katie Harrar, the event producer, says, "After almost a half a century of Harry running in this event, it's hard to imagine the race without him. He is a great ambassador for the sport of running."

Cordellos' athletic lifestyle and years of aerobic training changed his life.

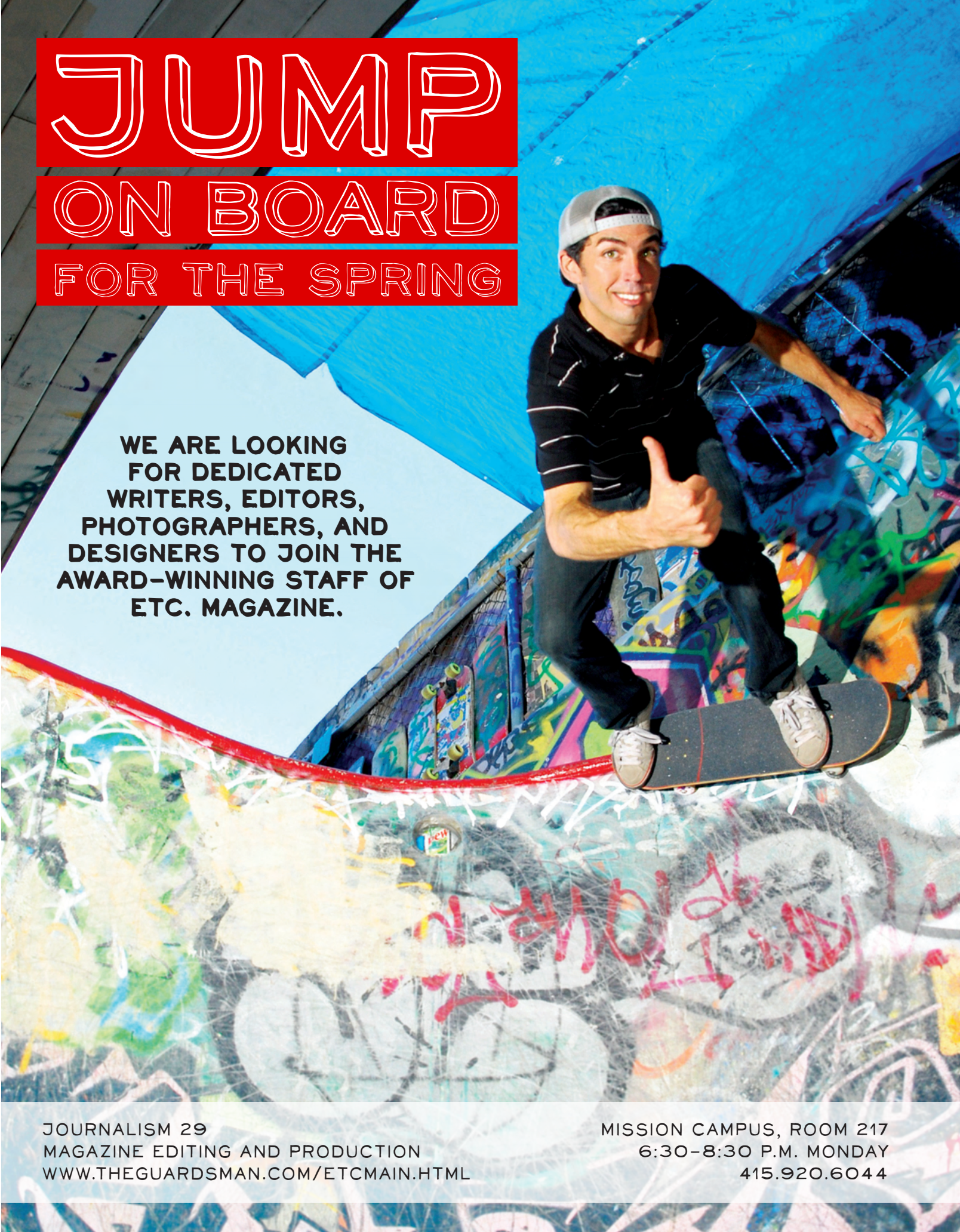
Everyone in the Cordellos family suffers from serious health issues, except Harry. He enjoys a "clean bill of health," which he attributes to exercise.

Of his siblings, "Peter, Joanne, and Nancy have all had bypass surgeries," he says. "Dennis has 'chest pain syndrome' and diabetes."

But Harry has no plans of slowing down.

"Exercise is the best life insurance plan there is," he says. "When I can't run, I'll walk."

Email Thomas Figg-Hoblyn at
scooptfh@gmail.com

A full-page background image of a skateboarder in a black polo shirt, dark pants, and a grey cap, performing a trick on a ramp covered in colorful graffiti. The ramp has a red handrail. The skateboarder is giving a thumbs up.

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